

*Military Culture 2.0: The Female Cadet's Approach, Feminine Competencies, and Pan-Critical Feminism - Drawing examples from American and Norwegian Special Forces*

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**Introduction**

*Feminism* as a perception and a concept has been used and abused for decades. Some view it as a positive movement, while others see it as threatening maleness and masculinity.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, it has meant different things. In the early twentieth century, it helped women to gain the right to vote in Norway in 1913 and in the United States in 1920.<sup>2</sup> In the late twentieth century, it promoted reproductive rights and shed light on workplace inequalities.<sup>3</sup> In the early twenty-first century, feminism became more than just a socio-political movement. It became an academic discipline and provided a new voice within the masculinised field of international relations.<sup>4</sup> Feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Laura R. Micciche, "Male Plight and Feminist Threat in Composition Studies: A Response to 'Teaching and Learning as a Man,'" *Composition Studies* (University of Cincinnati on behalf of Composition Studies) 25, 11997:, p. 32.)

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 84–108.

<sup>3</sup> Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 111-140.

<sup>4</sup> Drude Dahlerup, *The Development of Women's Studies/Gender Studies in Scandinavian Social Science* (Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University, 2015), p. 1.

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theory challenged the status quo, and through the voice of Cynthia Enloe, it asked, “Where are the women?”<sup>5</sup> Feminist theory also looked at power relations between states as well as human relations, identities, and genders. Today, outside academia, when someone says “I am a feminist,” it is considered by some as offensive or old-fashioned. Society tends to associate feminism with the phrase “man-hater” even though the association of the two words is false.<sup>6</sup> In academia, however, feminism often means different things to different people due to the term’s evolution. Some believe that feminism combines activism and critical questioning, while others do not consider it a legitimate political theory. In practice, feminism was created to help provide equality among men and women, diversify voices in academia, and enable society to equalise social, political, and economic rights.

This is the primary motivation behind the introduction of a new definition in the field of military studies. This article seeks to move beyond the debate over the meaning of the word *feminism* and apply feminist curiosity to military culture and its competencies through the approach of female military personnel. It was feminist curiosity that led to the author questioning the existing terminologies. Feminist curiosity is a term invented by Cynthia Enloe in her attempt to answer questions like *what if we look at the US Vietnam War from the viewpoint of the woman who is shining G.I. Joe’s shoes?*<sup>7</sup> Traditional I.R. scholars would examine war through the lens of the two states/parties clashing; they would never attempt to unpack the war through the eyes of a minor player such as the woman who shines the soldiers' shoes. However, by doing so, as Cynthia Enloe explained, we seek the questions we *do not have* and not just the answers *we have*; it allows us to be more candid about what we *do not know*,<sup>8</sup> so we can develop lesser-known perspectives. Hence, feminist curiosity reminds us that new concepts matter as it allows us to evolve the way we approach a subject. Concepts can help provide a clear understanding of the world and unpack many complex realities,

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<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Cathy Young, *Washington Post*, “[Feminists Treat Men Badly. It’s Bad For Feminism: The Fixation on Men Behaving Badly Distracts from More Fundamental Issues](#),” 30 June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland, *What Does it Mean to Have a Feminist Curiosity about International Politics?: A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe*, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nio078IQ\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nio078IQ_U), min. 2:22.

<sup>8</sup> Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland, min. 2:50.

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thereby bringing organisational change.<sup>9</sup> They enhance an organisation's culture by making it more relevant to its ever-changing community of people and by creating acceptable behaviours and norms for the community to abide by when operating within it. To achieve this goal, this article takes a close look at the feminist institutionalist theory and the politics of the body. It discusses how a new theoretical tool, *pan-critical feminism*, can add new perspectives to military training and education through the lens of feminine competencies.<sup>10</sup> It also examines whether military culture adds obstacles in applying such a narrative.

To clarify, the purpose of this article is not to provide an extensive analysis of how feminine competencies can fit within masculinised military values. It instead introduces the idea of pan-critical feminism as a next step in the dialogue involving women's incorporation into highly masculinised military roles such as direct combat. It also details how feminine competencies, which are often utilised by females, can add practical value to military training. Finally, this article illustrates how feminine competencies complement the already beneficial theories of feminist institutionalism and the politics of the body. A potential next step will be to approach the proposed idea from a practical perspective, meaning its potential application to military training and education by conducting interviews with leaders responsible for training and education.

### **Feminist Institutionalism**

B. Guy Peters reminds readers that "the roots of political science are in the study of institutions."<sup>11</sup> This is because institutions can create collective aims, redirect attention to more noble causes, and reshape people's behaviour by bringing them together to interact and accomplish goals. When political science was transformed into an academic discipline, its focus remained on institutional influence, as such influence

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<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> Survey data collected from 32,000 people revealed that "feminine competencies" are considered to include such traits as expressive, reasonable, flexible, patient, intuitive and collaborative. See John Gerzema, "Feminine Values Can Give Tomorrow's Leaders an Edge," *Harvard Business Review*, 12 August 2013.

<sup>11</sup> B. Guy Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science: The New Institutionalism*, 4th ed. (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2019), p. 1.

continued to be one of the powers that fuelled individual actions and habits. Institutional theory was first advanced in the late nineteenth century by sociologists Max Weber and Émile Durkheim and revived by John W. Meyer in 1977.<sup>12</sup> This led to new insights that became known as *new institutionalism* or *neo-institutionalism* through the work of James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, who named the movement in 1984.<sup>13</sup> March and Olsen later argued that collective action should become the dominant approach to understanding political life because it is a concept that explains the complex phenomenon chosen for the field of institutions.<sup>14</sup>

Despite its many theoretical variations, the core theme of new institutionalism is that institutions matter because they shape individuals' behaviour.<sup>15</sup> This approach highlights the various ways in which actors bring about or resist change in institutions and how institutions shape the nature of actors' behaviour through the construction of rules, norms, and policies.<sup>16</sup> There are three major common elements of new institutionalist theory. First, there is always a structural component, such as a legal policy framework or a web of small networks. Second, this structure is stable and consistently present over time. Third, an institution has the ability to affect individual behaviour because people believe in its shared values.<sup>17</sup> Put simply, institutions exist and are maintained because people are willing to commit to values other than their own self-interests. This tends to be because people believe that shared institutional values are nobler than their own personal values and as such will serve their interests in the future. John B. Rawls' theory of the veil of ignorance turns people into rational actors who rely on settled institutional criteria when making decisions to maximise their individual well-being.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, new institutionalism overlooks the relationship between gender and institutions. As such, it oversees how institutional rules have gendered effects and

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<sup>12</sup> Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Meryl Kenny, *Gender and Political Recruitment: Theorizing Institutional Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 34–62.

<sup>16</sup> Fiona Mackay, Meryl Kenny, and Louise Chappell, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism?" *International Political Science Review* 31, no. 5 (2010): pp. 573–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110388788>.

<sup>17</sup> Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, p. 21.

how different genders experience the outcomes of institutional rules. In other words,<sup>19</sup> the theory fails to engage with feminist literature and analyse how gender dynamics affect and shape the institutional process. For example, if a community's senior governing institutions are predominantly made up of men, those men can structure institutions and create laws to perpetuate the power of men over women. This is not always the case, but the historical exclusion of women from creating societal rules translates to the perpetuation of male-centred practices.<sup>20</sup> In response to this, a new variant of institutionalism was created: *feminist institutionalism*.<sup>21</sup> Essentially, the feminist institutionalist theory argues that gender blindness weakens the longevity of new institutionalism because it does not factor in the gendered nature of institutions and what that means for their structures. This new variant emphasises that when focused on the gendered nature of institutions, there is a clearer understanding of institutions, practices, ideas, and goals.

This is because everyone within an institution has both a sex and performative gender, and everyone's behaviour varies depending on their sex and gender.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, a person's decision in power not only depends on their education, background, and culture but also on their sex and performative gender<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, dismissing gender means that new institutionalism lacks the ability to fully understand the interplay of an institution's formal and informal dimensions, how this relationship changes over time, and the different effects of these changes on men and women. Specifically, an institution's formal dimension refers to organisational structures, policies, and contractual arrangements and such characteristics are readily available and stable over time.<sup>24</sup> However, the informal dimension refers to how institutions affect human behaviour in subtle ways, such as social preferences, traditions, and

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<sup>19</sup> Francesca Gains and Vivien Lowndes, "How is Gender Implicated in Institutional Design and Change? The Role of Informal Institutions: A Case of Study of Policy and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales," *European Research Council: Working Papers in Gender & Institutional Change*, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Kenny, *Gender and Political Recruitment*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Mackay, et.al, "New Institutionalism," p. 574.

<sup>22</sup> Kenny, *Gender and Political Recruitment*, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> Kenny, *Gender and Political Recruitment*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Hongdi Wang, Weisheng Lu, Jonas So"derlund, and Ke Chen, "The Interplay Between Formal and Informal Institutions in Projects: A Social Network Analysis", *Project Management Journal* 49, 4 (2018): pp. 20–35.

taboos.<sup>25</sup> The interplay between the two dimensions affects men and women differently. Taking institutional policies as an example, they only recently have been updated to consider women's needs as part of the organisational structure, which means that although such policies exist may not have come to full fruition in improving women's experiences yet. Similarly, the societal constraints that women have to operate under are more than those that men have to operate on. For instance, notions of “only men should serve in close combat roles”<sup>26</sup> or “women cannot be combatants because they are menstruating”<sup>27</sup> show that women have to overcome more preconceived notions before succeeding in male-dominated institutions. So, to go back to the initial argument, the interplay between formal and informal structures shapes human behaviour by enabling or constraining social activities.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the lack of acknowledgement of gender as a central factor for such social constraints is not holistic.

As such, feminist institutionalism aims to understand and explain how power is distributed within institutions.<sup>29</sup> It seeks to overcome the gender blindness of existing scholarship in the field, to include women as actors in institutional processes. The theory asks questions about the interplay between gender and the operation and effect of political institutions. It also considers the analytical strengths of new institutionalism, which provides important insights for understanding and answering real-world questions about power inequalities in public and institutional mechanisms of continuity and change.<sup>30</sup> Feminist institutionalism seeks to make gender the primary unit of analysis to initiate change to existing power dynamics within institutions and remove institutional barriers that maintain gender inequalities. Initiatives such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security call for the participation of women at all decision-making levels, including in international,

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<sup>25</sup> Wang, “The Interplay,” p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Megan MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers: The U.S. Military and the Myth that Women Can't Fight* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Jocelyn L. Chua, “Bloody War: Menstruation, Soldiering, and the Gender-Integrated United States Military”, *Critical Military Studies*, 24<sup>h</sup> April 2020, pp.139-158.

<sup>28</sup> Wang, “The Interplay,” p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Georgina Holmes, “Feminist Institutionalism,” in *United Nations Peace Operations and International Relations Theory*, ed. Kseniya Oksamytha and John Karlsrud (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 224, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526148889.00014>.

<sup>30</sup> Mackay, et al, “New Institutionalism,” p. 574.

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regional, and national security institutions as well as in roles that prevent, manage, and resolve conflict.<sup>31</sup>

Feminist institutionalism also aims to add value to institutional analysis by creating a discussion that will lead to the meaningful participation of women within institutions. Inspired by agency-structure debates, feminist institutionalism contests that institutions are not static but rather dynamic entities that constrain or enable social actors' behaviour both inside and outside the institution. In other words, the theory argues that institutions function on context-specific relationships between institutions and gendered social actors. The formal and informal rules, norms, and practices of institutions prescribe what is considered acceptable masculine and feminine behaviours for men and women and produce outcomes that enable the re/production of broader social and political gender expectations.<sup>32</sup> By drawing from a diverse body of feminist theories and methodologies, feminist institutionalists have contributed to a better understanding of how the boundaries between political institutions and the private lives of social actors came to be, as institutional dynamics shape the production of policies that impact the daily lives of those actors.

### **The Body in Institutional Terms**

Feminist institutionalism is a postcolonial theory that examines why the bodies of some social actors are regarded as the *accepted norm* in some institutions, for instance male bodies in the military, and analyses the role of patriarchy in sustaining such norms.<sup>33</sup> Patriarchy's sustainability is in itself a process that requires thoughts, actions, attitudes, and relationships that position men and women in distinct and unequal categories and value particular forms of masculinity over all forms of femininity, thereby ensuring that men who fulfil these favoured forms of manliness will be able to assert control in society.<sup>34</sup> Patriarchy is a driving force of the type of competencies or values that should and could be used by institutions, especially masculinised institutions. As Michel Foucault once said, "One needs to study what kind of body the current society needs" to understand their marginalisation or glorification within

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<sup>31</sup> Holmes, "Feminist Institutionalism," p. 214.

<sup>32</sup> Holmes, "Feminist Institutionalism," p. 216.

<sup>33</sup> Holmes, "Feminist Institutionalism," p. 219.

<sup>34</sup> Enloe, *The Big Push*, p. 49.

institutions. It is not about the ability of the body itself, but the ability of society to accept the performance of that body within a given context.<sup>35</sup>

Foucault's argument links to Megan MacKenzie's reaction to women's inclusion in the US military, which is discussed in the next section. If one were to view the role of women or the role of female competencies within the military objectively, one would not hesitate to recognise such contributions. In reality, however, there has been resistance for several reasons. First, numerous beliefs and traditions want the military to play a primary role in "turning boys into men."<sup>36</sup> Second, the inclusion of women or female competencies within the military shifts the dynamics of power and status.<sup>37</sup> Third, social perceptions exist that state that women's bodies should have access only to feminine spaces, which in the military are often supporting roles. As Laura E. Masson reaffirms, this certain positioning of women has turned the military into a masculinised elite with a "national moral reserve."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, the politics of the body - also known as body politics refers to the social and political practices and policies that society uses to regulate and control the human body<sup>39</sup> - it recognises that institutions are a particular kind of collective body where their members feel part of the same, which motivates them to stay together. As Kandida Purnell explains, the international system is full of "body" metaphors, as references to "organs of the United Nations" or "head of states" indicate.<sup>40</sup> Phrases such as the *public eye*, the *arm of the army*, and more recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, that health care workers became the *beating heart of every nation* show that these metaphors matter because they turn the collective action of institutions into body parts of a nation. The politics of the body materialises the kind of power discourse that

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon, et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> Katharine M. Millar and Joanna Tidy, "Combat as a Moving Target: Masculinities, the Heroic Soldier Myth, and Normative Martial Violence," *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): pp. 142–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1302556>.

<sup>37</sup> Nadia Brown and Sarah Allen Gershon, "Body Politics'," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5, no. 1 (2017): pp. 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1276022>.

<sup>38</sup> Laura E. Masson, "Women in the Military in Argentina: Nationalism, Gender, and Ethnicity," in *Gender Panic, Gender Policy*, ed. Vasilikie Demos and Marcia Texler Segal (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, "Body Politics'," p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Kandida Purnell, *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics: Bodies, Body Politics, and the Body Politic in a Time of Pandemic* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), pp. 96-97.



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produces the phenomena that it regulates and constraints.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, when collective bodies take collective action, they become a single subject that needs to comply with certain regulatory norms that make it a “good” body.<sup>42</sup> When a “good” body is disturbed by change that affects its collective homogeneity, it is seen as parasitic.<sup>43</sup> Put it simply, any change that might affect the values and norms that unite the collective is seen as destroying the harmony of the “good” body even if ultimately change brings positive results. In the case of the military, female soldiers and their feminine competencies are perceived to threaten the “alpha male” and “elite soldier” narrative,<sup>44</sup> when in reality the inclusion of women and feminine competencies are not only unavoidable due to the changing nature of war but also necessary, since institutions look different today through their emphases on empathy, resilience, and turning vulnerabilities into strengths. It is important to note that such effects are not limited only to female soldiers, but also to people of colour and people of the LGBTQI+ community. However, the article seeks to analyse the effects on women and specifically on female soldiers.

Overall, the politics of the body adds a new layer of understanding to this issue, as it illustrates why we, as researchers, need to question more why bodies are attached to certain competencies, and fuel the discussion on connecting gender and the *good* body to understand who is considered *worthy* of having access to power. The institutional discussion on the politics of the body shows that institutions could and should differentiate between their “ruling minds” (meaning their rules) and “ruling bodies” (meaning their practices) because it will enable them to approach new narratives with an open mind and constructively discuss their application.<sup>45</sup> Institutions often review their policies and structures, ensuring governance is robust. However, they often forget to examine how the people who make up the organisation experience those policies and structures. Feminist curiosity, for example, would point to how the

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<sup>41</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Purnell, *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics*, p. 99; and Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Purnell, *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics*, p. 99.

<sup>44</sup> Juanita M. Firestone, “Reviewed Work: Military Masculinities: Identity and the State by Paul R. Higate,” *Armed Forces & Society* 30, No. 2 (Winter 2004): pp. 311-313.

<sup>45</sup> Terry Macdonald, “Democratizing Global ‘Bodies Politic’: Collective Agency, Political Legitimacy, and the Democratic Boundary Problem,” *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric* 10, no. 2 (2018): pp. 22-42, <https://doi.org/10.21248/gjn.10.2.143>.

newly recruited female cadet in the marines is experiencing training; whether she thinks her views are considered during training. Similarly, whether the commander will consider the female cadet as a team leader or dismiss her simply because marines traditionally are made for training male bodies are questions embedded in the notion of feminist curiosity. In other words, this discussion strips institutions to their bare bones to unveil how and why the marginalisation of certain bodies impacts institutional operations. The marginalisation of certain bodies also means the marginalisation of the point of view of the particular body, namely the female body. To further understand that, one must look at institutional metaphors. Metaphors are vital to the survival of institutions, as they motivate people to want to be part of them. Therefore, if one wants to challenge institutional policies and practices, one should challenge their attached metaphors.<sup>46</sup>

In practice, military training manuals such as the US Air Force's *AFROTC Field Training Manual* acknowledge the importance of politics of the body through linguistics by referring to "female cadets," "male cadets," "female captains," and "male captains."<sup>47</sup> However, there is no explicit mention of feminine competencies or how to employ them in training. Of course, one could argue that there is no mention of masculine competencies either, but it is worth stating that because the entire organisational design of the military is inherently a power structure based on male traits, masculine competencies are comprehended and lived by its members every day.<sup>48</sup> MacKenzie asks, "How can you change a policy when it does not exist?" when discussing the exclusion of women from combat roles. Similarly, it is hard to argue to change a military practice that is not fully realised. But if the defence community wants to evolve and innovate, it needs to take advantage of what is already available, such as female soldiers and their unique approach to executing tasks through feminine competencies.

### Rerouting Feminism

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<sup>46</sup> Purnell, *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics*, p. 100.

<sup>47</sup> *AFROTC Field Training Manual*, Holm Center T-203 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Jeanne M. Holm Center, 2021), pp. 32 & 50.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew J. Morgan, "Women in a Man's World: Gender Differences in Leadership at the Military Academy," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 34, no. 12 (2006): pp. 2482–2502, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2004.tb01988.x>.

As discussed above, feminist institutionalism uses feminist curiosity to elevate new institutionalism and uncover the hidden truth about the role of gender within institutions. The positive effects of feminist curiosity, meaning the asking of unasked questions and not taking for granted existing structures, would not exist without feminist theory. In the twenty-first century, with socio-political movements such as Black Lives Matter, the emphasis on women's safety<sup>49</sup> and the importance of highlighting voices outside the Anglo-Saxon and Western worlds<sup>50</sup> shows that it is time for the term *feminism* to evolve even further. Indeed, it is time to rebrand feminism<sup>51</sup> so that it can be better understood as the inclusive term it truly is. This new term should also describe the critical thinking that a diverse body of feminists brought into the fields of international relations as well as its intersectional nature. It should shift emphasis away from looking at gender alone to include female-perceived competencies and how they impact military training and education. This new term will move beyond what is known to make space for a discussion that is about investigating critically institutional culture and how it can be more effective when used by organisational actors, regardless of their gender.

This new term should be *pan-critical feminism*. The prefix *pan*, which in Ancient Greek meant *all*, shows that this term encompasses all women, genders, and races and involves all parts of the world. The word *critical* emphasises and prioritises feminism curiosity when looking at military culture. *Feminism* represents the field of feminist theory, which enables scholars to look beyond the surface.

Pan-critical feminism can be used to dive into the field of military culture and suggest female-perceived competencies as a missing puzzle piece to military training and education. As such, pan-critical feminism examines how female perceived-competencies contribute to institutional values by ensuring the approaches of that institution are robust and relevant to its cohort. When soldiers' bodies are both male and female, the military institution should be represented by the presence of male- and female-branded competencies, since each set of competencies carry different qualities necessary for the advancement of the armed forces. As the next section shows through

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<sup>49</sup> Alexandra Topping, "Reporting on Women's Safety: We Tell the Stories that Have Been Ignored," *The Guardian*, 13 April 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Raj Kumar Mishra, "Postcolonial Feminism: Looking Into Within-Beyond-To Difference," *International Journal of English and Literature* 4, 4 (June, 2013:), pp. 129-134..

<sup>51</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.

specific examples, the issue is that female-branded competencies have been ignored and dismissed during training, which has often resulted in ignoring women's approaches to conducting operations.

Feminism highlights that the construction of gender is social.<sup>52</sup> Pan-critical feminism reiterates that notion to refer to the social construction of competencies. Since male and female competencies are socially constructed and perceived, men and women alike can learn both sets of competencies, rendering gender irrelevant. One way that shows there is a need for better incorporation of both sets of competencies by both genders, but especially by men, is the high level of sexual harassment cases in the US military, which jumped from 2016 to 2018 by 38 percent.<sup>53</sup> The disappearance and killing of Specialist Vanessa Guillen in April 2020 captured the attention not only of the military world but also of lawmakers as Guillen had raised allegations of sexual harassment before her death.<sup>54</sup> Such incidents and behaviours show a need to integrate female perceived competencies into military culture. Such competencies could shift individuals who exhibit abusive behaviours and re-align them with military values by updating their military training. As such, their incorporation in military training and education will represent the changing cohort of the armed forces. This would translate into considering the approaches and perspectives of female military personnel more widely and frequently. If the military is no longer an *all boys club* and does not only fight wars but also participates in disaster and humanitarian operations, it may be time to update its approach to training and education, making it more gender-neutral to reflect such change. Pan-critical feminism is one theoretical tool that can enable such change, as it emphasises the importance of masculine and feminine competencies and values in creating a "good institution."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Kime, "Despite Efforts, Sexual Assaults Up Nearly 40% in US Military," *Military.Com*, 2 May 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Johnny Diaz, Maria Cramer and Christina Morales, "What to Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen," *The New York Times*, 30 April 2021.

<sup>55</sup> According to B. Guy Peters, "a good institution is one that performs an assigned task well and efficiently, usually while maintaining a commitment to other powerful norms such as democracy." See Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, p. 77.

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## Feminine Competencies in Action

According to Frank B. Steder's research, military exercises conducted by male and female platoons of the Norwegian Armed Forces show that the female platoons can be more successful in completing the same task. For example, during winter exercises, the female platoon ended up covering the same distances on skis at the same pace or faster than the male platoon. The main reason for this was the distribution of weight in each eight-person team. While the male team carried their traditional 120-liter backpacks in one sledge, the female team carried their backpacks in four sledges. The outcome of this variation in weight distribution was that the female team carried more (and heavier) equipment that was distributed more evenly across the entire team. Consequently, the female team was moving at the same pace or even faster than the male team. The female team was also more alert and awake than the male team during non-ski periods. This relatively simple experiment indicated to the *Forsvarets Spesialkommando* (the special operations forces of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Defence) that the female approach could improve the efficiency of ski patrols, providing new input to the traditional approach that had been used for years.<sup>56</sup>

Taking Steder's findings further, it can be argued that the female team outperformed their male counterparts because they used female-related competencies to perform their task. Specifically, the female team was more flexible and intuitive in their approach, as they wanted to tailor the exercise to fit themselves—not the other way around—without compromising the mission. In the same vein, during US Marine Corps recruit training a mixed-gender platoon had to move ammunition cans from one side of a rope bridge to the other. The male recruits insisted on taking the strand of cord connected to the cans, hanging it over their shoulders, and shuffling across the bridge. Only when the recruits struggled to complete the task, since the 30-pound dead weight made them unstable and caused them almost to fall off the bridge, did they take an interest in their female counterparts' approach. The female recruits first tied the cord of each ammunition can to the bridge and then pushed the container to the other side.<sup>57</sup> The female recruits had remained patient while their male counterparts tested their

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<sup>56</sup> F. B. Steder, "Yes, if willing, someone can learn something from Norway," *Graduate School of Operational & Information Sciences / The Defense Analysis Department (GSOIS/DA) Naval Postgraduate School*, Monterey, CA, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Destination Occupation, "Part 3: Military Culture 101," YouTube video, 22:18, 20 September 2016.

technique and then took decisive action by choosing a more reasonable approach. These simple experiments during military training show that feminine-branded competencies, which tend to be used more often by female soldiers, have something to add to military training and education, which becomes even more significant during active operations.

However, the reality is that feminine-branded competencies are often perceived to be weaker because they are used more often by female soldiers. As Megan MacKenzie argues, much of the logic in excluding women from combat roles is based either wholly or partially on emotion. Policy debates frequently involve arguments that may appear logical but are based on emotional reactions. For example, Bill Muehlenberg is a firm believer that *men are protectors* and has viewed the feminist movement as an attack against that perceived role. In another example, Ablow claims that women in combat would “bleed out some wonderful chivalrous quality in men.” There is an emotional expression here, not only of the fear of change, but of a potential loss of precious and essential qualities in men.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, this belief sees male soldiers instinctively wanting to protect their female counterparts in combat, which causes problems on the battlefield.<sup>59</sup> However, this argument is not concerned with the capacity of women to fight or their potential role within a military institution—it is about women challenging the nature of men and their privileged role in society.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, this type of positioning does not draw on data or evidence but rather refers to the socially perceived nature of men and women,<sup>61</sup> as well as the potential threats that women could pose to military culture and national security, as proof to exclude women from combat roles.

Although these examples are specific to women in combat, it can also be applied to the use of feminine competencies in military training and education. The exclusion of such competencies is often based more on emotional reaction rather than hard evidence. As was discussed above, the approaches of women to military tasks can be equally effective as or better than those of men if male commanders and soldiers are open to recognising and accepting them. This can also be learned and applied more evenly when incorporated into training and education. The nature of the wars in Iraq and

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<sup>58</sup> MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers*, p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> A. King, “Women in battle: The female soldier,” *Parameters* 43, 3 (2013).

<sup>60</sup> MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers*, p. 81.

<sup>61</sup> MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers*, p. 80.

Afghanistan made it impossible to strictly exclude women from combat, as “front line” roles were often blurred. For example, female support units processed Afghan women at checkpoints, exposing them to potential enemy attacks. In 2010, the US Department of Defence confirmed that 108 female military personnel had died in Iraq and 20 more had died in Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup> The point of these statistics is to show that although female personnel were in supporting roles, and therefore should not have put their lives in immediate danger, they did. In other words, although they were not officially considered *front line* their work was *front line*. While the nature of war naturally changes and evolves, it seems that in this instance it demanded change before society was able to recognise it, since women in the United States had been fighting on the front lines for nearly a decade, as the early 200s Team Lioness experiment confirms,<sup>63</sup> before the US military’s ban on women serving in combat was reversed in 2013.

### **Military Culture: Is It Really an Obstacle?**

A robust institutional culture is the means of survival for any organisation. The greater the institutionalisation, the greater the degree of understanding the organisation’s culture and how it shapes the performative identity of institutional actors. Put simply, organisational culture consists of the norms, behaviours, and practices performed within an organisation.<sup>64</sup> Culture defines what an institution stands for, how it operates, and what its members accept in terms of actions and behaviours. According to Karen O. Dunivin, “It is a way of life that is learned and shared by human beings, and it is taught by one generation to the next.”<sup>65</sup> More specifically, Peter J. Katzenstein distinguishes between constitutive and regulatory norms, which play a central role in organising institutions. Constitutive norms enable actors to construct their identities, which in turn give meaning to their actions. By providing identities and

<sup>62</sup> *Understanding the Military: The Institution, the Culture, and the People: Information for Behavioural Healthcare Specialists Working with Veterans and Service Members* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2010), p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> *Lioness*, directed by Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers (New York: Room 11 Productions, 2008), 73.2 min.

<sup>64</sup> Terry Terriff, “Innovate or Die: Organizational Culture and the Origins of Maneuver Warfare in the United States Marine Corps,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 3 (2006): pp. 475–503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390600765892>.

<sup>65</sup> Karen O. Dunivin, “Military Culture: Change and Continuity,” *Armed Forces & Society* 20, no. 4 (1994): pp. 531–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9402000403>.

prescribing actions, norms shape the way actors define interests and suggest what they should do in terms of change in organisational culture. In other words, norms condition what is deemed acceptable through establishing culture. Indeed, culture shapes uniform collective action by providing a set of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct their activities.<sup>66</sup> Culture is the engine that gives meaning to operations.

Although organisational culture differs in shape and form within each institution, it has three common characteristics. First, it is passed from one cohort to the next. Second, it is widely accepted by its members. Third, it focuses on collective action through rituals and symbols. As Dunivin points out, although militaries have a unique culture, they have these three characteristics.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, military culture is learned through training, is accepted and practiced by all members, and has adopted language that is symbolic in nature and which only military personnel can understand. Military culture ultimately exists to interpret the organisational ways of war, which militaries need to understand in order to operate effectively. For example, during World War II the different organisational cultures of the British and German militaries influenced their perceptions of the acceptability of submarine attacks against civilian ships and how this, in turn, shaped national priorities for limiting the use of force.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, military culture creates the rules under which personnel operate during training and war. This can explain why female soldiers have been excluded, since they did not fit within the traditional definition of military culture and its practices.

However, Regina F. Titunik reminds readers that the art of warfare is about disciplining groups of individuals and moulding them into a single unit so that they can operate effectively as one *body*." As Plato argues in *The Republic*, victory in war is an art, and any art requires certain personality traits and a specific training regimen.<sup>69</sup> The type of personality that makes a person a "good guardian," as Plato puts it, is distributed among both men and women, and therefore all members of the military, regardless of their gender, should be trained to defend their city. Both women and men have traits and competencies necessary to the art of war. Nevertheless, there is a predominant view

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<sup>66</sup> Terriff, "Innovate or Die," pp. 479-481.

<sup>67</sup> Dunivin, "Military Culture," p. 533.

<sup>68</sup> Terriff, "Innovate or Die," p. 478.

<sup>69</sup> Regina F. Titunik, "The First Wave: Gender Integration and Military Culture," *Armed Forces & Society* 26, no. 2 (2000): pp. 229-57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0002600204>.



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that the military promotes aggression, which is identified as a male trait. In reality, however, the art of war, which has created the need for militaries, is more about “regularised collective activity” that is performed by the “disciplined warrior-hero.”<sup>70</sup>

When conducting training, US Army National Guard colonel Andrew Gibson said, “Those of us who have experienced war, we hate war. So, the best thing about a war is ending it as quickly as possible. And if you are going to have one, I want to be there to make sure it is done right. . . . If we were naturally violent, we would not be very good at our job because we have to depend on one another.”<sup>71</sup> Gibson’s words emphasise that attention should be on the nature of war today, what it requires, and how newer military members in combat roles can help execute the mission, rather than whether femininity fits one’s perception of what military culture is.

Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* states that good warriors seek effectiveness in battle. There is no mention of men being more effective as “good warriors” than women, and Sun Tzu does not emphasise masculine traits as more successful in battle than feminine competencies. Instead, he looks at the art of war and suggests ways to end a war faster and with fewer casualties.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, it seems that military culture’s emphasis on the *elite soldier* or *good warrior* being a man or demanding masculine traits is simply a social construct. The culture itself does not, by nature, add any obstacles to integrating women and female approaches within the military. Rather, these obstacles are created by social perceptions of what military culture is supposed to be.

Of course, it is worth stating that today’s society looks very different from centuries ago when Sun Tzu and Plato wrote their manuscripts. However, the essence of the military remains the same, steeped in effectiveness, discipline, and innovation. As Micha Ables states, policies take time to change, and such time should be used to mould new policies that have better application through their practices. The military did not always welcome racial integration, either, and desegregation was not successfully implemented immediately. Perhaps the integration of feminine competencies is now

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<sup>70</sup> Titunik, “The First Wave,” p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> “Part 3: Military Culture 101.”

<sup>72</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (West Sussex, UK: Capstone, 2010).

playing this role of the “unreasonable” and “imperfect” approach to changing culture—until its contribution is ultimately realised.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, although military innovation differs thematically and needs its own unit of analysis, it is worth noting Michael C. Horowitz and Shira E. Pindyck’s approach, which views military innovation as “changes in the conduct of warfare designed to increase the ability of a military community to generate power.”<sup>74</sup> These changes can be big or small, but they need to be considered at an operational level and be relevant to the military community. As mentioned above, when institutionalisation has strong foundations, this translates into strong institutionalised power. Hence, when militaries are firmly institutionalised, they turn to military innovation, which is designed to improve the ability of a military community to increase its power.<sup>75</sup> Although integrating and utilising feminine competencies has not yet been tested at an operational level, this author argues that it can contribute to the advancement of military training and education if examined systemically in-field training and integrated in training manuals through the employment of pan-critical feminism.

### Conclusion

This article illustrates the necessity to rethink military culture and suggests the embedment of feminine-branded competencies within military training and education. To do that, it has examined feminist institutionalism, which emphasises gender in the analysis of institutions. The article also looked at the politics of the body, noting how the accession and exclusion of “bodies” from certain institutions are a social construct and do not reflect such the abilities of those bodies to perform required tasks. It then briefly referenced the ancient texts of Plato and Sun Tzu to illustrate that the art of war is about effective strategy and the “disciplined warrior hero,” a label that should include both men and women. This article has rerouted *feminism* to mould a new theoretical tool called *pan-critical feminism* and explained how it enables the integration of feminine competencies in the armed forces. Finally, through the lens of organisational culture, the article looked at military culture to show that there is space

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<sup>73</sup> Micah Ables, “Women Are Not the Problem. Standards Are,” *Modern War Institute at West Point*, 2 May 2019.

<sup>74</sup> M. C. Horowitz, and S. E. Pindyck “What is Military Innovation and Why It Matters?” *SSRN*. October Draft, 16, 2021. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3504246](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3504246).

<sup>75</sup> Horowitz and Pindyck, “What is Military Innovation,”

for the implementation of this proposed idea, even though various social perceptions of what a military's purpose is and who should perform its responsibilities presents obstacles.

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